

2018

Traduciendo Mi Reflejo: Do You See Me?

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Traduciendo Mi Reflejo: Do You See Me?

Melina Mardueño

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Prerequisite for Honors in Studio Art
under the advisement of
Daniela Rivera and Andrew Mowbray

April 2018

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Acknowledgements:

First and foremost, I would like to thank my advisors Andy and Daniela for encouraging me to take on a senior thesis. Despite all of my self-doubt, they built me back up and reminded me that I was just as capable as anyone else. They remind me all the time why I am grateful to have them as professors and mentors.

I would also like to thank the faculty and staff Art Department for all that they do and everyone on my thesis review committee for their time.

Thank you to my fellow studio art seniors and friends; especially to Natalí for all of the favors she gave me and Anjali for our inspired conversations.

Thank you to my siblings for always encouraging me and especially my brother Francisco for collecting so much of my material for me over the course of the year. To my mother and father, thank you for giving me the opportunity to become who I am. *Gracias por apoyarme aunque me fui tan lejos. No nos vamos a arrepentir.*

Initial thoughts:

This body of work deals with self-portraiture and self-fashioning, lineage, representation, reflection, as well as mechanical and handmade reproduction. I have made one large drawing consisting of four life-size self-portraits, two videos, and four sweaters. The self-portrait of four is titled *Fulano, Mengano, Zutano, and Perengano (Self-Portrait)*, names which are frequently in Spanish used to denote someone unknown. In this self-portrait, I have drawn myself four times, over four different days. The videos, *There I am* and *That I Painted my Hair*, deal with the way I change myself and create my image although the latter deals with the cultural repercussions of breaking the mold. The last piece I made was a set of four sweaters titled, *Do You See Me?* These are white sweaters that I made with my mother with the title flocked onto them with my hair. This is an analysis of categorization and the inability to record experience or identity through simple or symbolic representations. Ironically, my work perpetuates that issue.

The idea for this thesis came from various sources. My older work mostly consisted of drawing, so I started with self-portraits. At the same time, I began creating videos about myself, and they seemed to fit well with what I wanted to say through this project. I was concerned with representation of people like me, but I wanted to distinguish myself as a subject worth portraying without having to resort to stereotypes. Since the summer of 2017, I worked as a curatorial intern and assistant at the Davis Museum in Wellesley, MA. One of my responsibilities was to write justifications on new acquisitions for the collection. This consisted of researching and writing a short document about the newly acquired artwork and the artist. These justifications I wrote as a curatorial assistant also influenced this thesis because I came into contact with artists unknown to me. Many of the contemporary Mexican-American artists I researched were dealing with similar themes. Shizu Saldamando, who felt she could not relate to the people represented in popular

media, set out to portray the people she felt connected to. Working from photographs she takes herself, she draws and paints her subjects as they are, acknowledging that their identity as punks and people of color is still present in their clothes and bodies.¹ Then there is the performance group Asco from the 1980s that also criticized big art institutions and the Chicano art movement for their restrictive portrayal of Chicanxs.² With self-representation, I did not want to have to be blatantly direct about what or who I am. I do not want to fall into the repetition of some of the stereotypes that say, “Look at me, I’m a Xicanx artist! Look at my brown skin! And my indigenous culture! Fuck the colonizer!” Maybe some of those sentiments are there, but it’s not something that I bluntly say with every encounter. I wanted to present myself as I believe I am, and have viewers wonder for themselves where I fall. I know who I am, and I think people like me will know who I am, too. This is an investigation of me and of how I portray and represent myself.

¹ Carren Jao, “Counter Cliché: The Asian and Latino Bi-Cultural Experience,” KCET, May 28, 2013, <https://www.kcet.org/shows/artbound/counter-cliche-the-asian-and-latino-bi-cultural-experience>.

² C. Ondine Chavoya et al., eds., *Asco: Elite of the Obscure: A Retrospective, 1972-1987* (Ostfildern, Germany : [Williamstown, Mass.] : [Los Angeles]: Hatje Cantz ; Williams College Museum of Art ; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2011).



Figure 1 Photograph of studio space with charcoal self-portraits.

Reflections on the Origins of my Self-Portrait:

The most obvious answer to why I chose myself as the subject of my artwork is accessibility. I am available to myself whenever I feel like I need to draw or work on any piece. I also don't like to be watched when I am working. I hesitate, and I constantly wonder if I am being judged or critiqued. I feel a gaze over my shoulder and on my back, and I can no longer function. Am I ashamed of the implied narcissism? Do you see me seeing myself in the mirror? My studio walls are covered in drawings of myself. It feels like I have been caught in the middle of a forbidden act: reproducing myself with a mirror and my hand.



Figure 2 Photograph of studio space with charcoal self-portraits

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I occasionally stare at myself in the mirror and wonder who that person is. I do not recognize her all the time, and sometimes I see her as a different body apart from mine. All of a sudden, I will feel like I am not the one looking. There is a realization that my reflection will look back at me, too. When I draw in the studio, I imagine myself as a translator of the image in the mirror to a drawing on paper.

--

As an art history and studio art double-major, I have rarely felt like I have seen art about people like me except in a class about Post-Conquest Mexico, but I still never felt like they were actually like me. If anything, that relates to my parents. I was not born in Mexico. I do not dress like them, or wear my hair in the same way. I do not want to see Diego Rivera's idyllic

campesinos or Frida Kahlo playing dress-up in Tehuana clothing. I reject the performance of indigeneity and the concealment of European blood in *mestizos*. We can fucking see it.

--

I once asked my mother what we were (racially), and I remember she couldn't really answer me. She said we were Mexican, but what does that mean? I know what it means. I reject *mestizaje* as José Vasconcelos' cosmic race, "*la raza*."³ Mexico adores its *mestizaje*, or mix of indigenous and Spanish race and culture. They fully embrace their hybridity as the epitome of Mexico, yet the hierarchy of race and color still exists.

My mom said we're not white.

In Marilyn Grace Miller's critique of *The Cosmic Race*, she discusses how Chicanos and Chicanas have appropriated the ideologies of *The Cosmic Race*, and so it has become "an icon of Chicano identity that is revered without being understood or sufficiently questioned," because it fits the narrative of the justification of the mestizo in the United States.⁴ I understand the need to want to be validated because I want that for myself, but do I belong here more than white Americans do? I do not think all Chicanxs deserve to be here in the United States more than anyone else, and I laugh at the idea of Aztlan. Yes, borders are man-made. I know about the border. I could not visit Mexico until I could get a passport without a parental signature. Regardless of being descended from indigenous people, if we, Chicanxs, are worried about colonization, we must ask why we think we can occupy the land on which the United States is formed since we don't belong to the nations that were there first.

³ Marilyn Grace Miller, "José Vasconcelos' About-Face on the Cosmic Race," in *Rise and Fall of the Cosmic Race: The Cult of Mestizaje in Latin America*, 1st. ed (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), 36, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/well/detail.action?docID=3443153>.

⁴ Miller, 38.

Identity and the Desire to be Identified:

Identity is, and always will be, a source of anger for me. While I feel like I am this way a majority of the time, identity brings out the worst in me, and it frustrates me. I do not feel connected to a history or a place. I say that I am Mexican, but am I really? I do not even have the language anymore. I did not learn in their schools or live under their government.

My parents are Mexican, but what am I? You can't really be American if you have been raised by Mexicans.

First-Generation Mexican-American, is that what I am?

What does that say except that with every generation after me there will only be losses and people forgotten?

Loss and Distance:

“Who are your family members? Where is your family home? Who are your ancestors?”

“I do not know.”

--

For a culture that is so attuned to the past, we don't really know who we are. Mexico: obsessed with the Aztec past when most of us are probably descended from their tribute-payers.

--

“Rejecting the colonizers' language? How do you know Nahuatl was ever yours?”

--

“Are mestizos not as much, if not more, Spanish than native? If they didn't know we had Spanish names, maybe we could pass as white.”

--

Only in the United States could I ever have felt this way. Would I ever have questioned myself if I were only described by other mestizos by the color of my skin, the result of centuries of mixing? The labels I use to connect to others here suggest a place or country like when I call myself a Mexican-American. With Latina, I am part of the amalgamation of Latin America. Do we have anything in common other than the Conquest?

Coming to Terms with Chicanidad

I preferred not to call myself Chicana anymore. I associate the label with the stereotypes of Chicanxs too much. That is not me. A Chicax is someone with Mexican heritage, but there is more to that word and Xicanx is even more loaded with the claim of indigeneity.

Only Harry Gamboa Jr. has ever convinced me that I am a Chicana since instead of abandoning the label, he argued that Chicax was broader than what we might think. He was part of a multimedia conceptual art group named Asco from the early 1970s through the 1980s. They formed on the premise that they needed to assert their place in the mainstream art world as Chicanxs although they were “often at odds with the restrictive definitions of cultural and aesthetic ‘authenticity’ posited by the Chicano art movement.”⁵ In an interview with Gamboa and curator Luis C. Garza, the two discussed issues relating the Chicax identity and how Gamboa challenged stereotypes about Chicanxs with Asco:

Mainstream media insists on a vacuum, but there is no vacuum. That required us to generate our own media. And this predates the internet, so it's graphics, fliers, photographs. Asco was our foray into interrupting some of this. And a lot of it was in response to this insistence to remove the Chicano from the conversation. That persists today. The lack of a multitude of representations of Chicanos and Chicanas — this allows people to insert negative ideas into the vacuum.⁶

I suppose we cannot be visible unless we make ourselves visible by producing the representations. I wonder how I can be visible without giving in to the stereotypes of Chicanxs and Latinxs, alike. If I abandon my label, am I reinforcing the stereotypes?

⁵ Chavoya et al., *Asco*, 18.

⁶ Carolina A. Miranda, “Photographers Harry Gamboa Jr. and Luis Garza on Pushing Back against ‘bad Hombre’ Chicano Stereotypes,” *Los Angeles Times* (Online); Los Angeles, March 23, 2018, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/2017455879/abstract/5D7449178284B4APQ/1>.

Visibility and the Invisible

I remember early on in the process, one of my advisors, questioned the clothing I wore in my self-portraits. Maybe it came up as well, why I chose to wear clothes at all, but that could have been a question I posed for myself. In one of the few examples in which I feel that I can see myself, there is a woman with my trapezoidal hairline, round jaw, and cheekbones that form the widest points on our faces. She appears in the mural, *Presencia de América Latina* by Jorge González Camarena. I'm upset that she's nude; she holds open a fabric that was likely wrapped around her. She offers her body to the viewer which is partially hidden by a translucent map of Latin America. I'm furious that she is nude. Why does she have to be that way? Why is she offering herself? Her expression is plain like mine.



Figure 3. Detail of *Presencia de América Latina*

I did not make self-portraits for my body to be looked at. I did not plan to be passive in them. I wanted them to confront the viewer. See how I construct myself? Can you see me in all of these portraits and not just the ones in which you can see my body? In all of my self-portraits, there is the presence of my arm and eyes in the lines I drew. You can see how unsure I am of the width of my shoulders and arms. The only line I am sure of is the central axis that divides me in two. There is also the mirror I used, which warped my image throughout the process. Then again, I suppose I can never look at myself except through the means of a mediator. If it is not through a reflection, it is through a camera.

I wonder how different I act when I am being recorded. In my drawings, I am said to be “closed off.” Am I more open in my videos? Maybe it is where I truly am myself, and I am letting you, the viewer, see me. No, I allow you to watch me from over my shoulder. I know you are watching. I feel like I am still performing since one does not cut or dye their hair in a studio.



Figure 4 *Fulano, Mengano, Zutano, and Perengano (Self-Portrait)*, charcoal on paper.

Fulano, Mengano, Zutano, and Perengano:

For a while, I would not draw any of the words or print on the clothes I wore in my self-portraits because I wanted to be reduced to a type of myself that was somewhat timeless. I could recall my clothing from the day I made the portrait, although I suppose a viewer could not know what I was actually wearing if I had not drawn it. I changed this when I drew the first self-portrait of the four in *Fulano, Mengano, Zutano, and Perengano*. I was wearing a white Champion sweatshirt that was two sizes too big. It only had an embroidered “c” on it. It was so minute but at the same time, an important marker of the material that I did not want to exclude. At that point, I felt like I needed to continue drawing all the details, especially since this drawing recorded my body as I existed during the few hours it took me to draw each figure.

I planned to draw one self-portrait every night since I could produce one in a few hours. This also meant that I did not have to worry about my clothes or hair changing. I did stop after the second since I found the long nights in the studio unsustainable since I had other obligations to worry about. Therefore, days passed before I produced the third. I remember spending a significant amount of time on the clothing, so when I went to work on the face, I was not careful about getting my likeness. It bothered me how careless it looked, but I wanted to sit with it. Eventually, I went back and edited my face before continuing because I felt like I could not sit with this shoddy representation of myself. While I am not content with it, I can't say I am content with any of them or their likeness to me. They are all still me, despite the nuances between them. They reflect me and how I was seeing myself in the moment. I later found photos I took in the mirrors in which I could see how distorted I was, so the drawings were actually accurate to the image the mirror produced.

Fulano, Mengano, Zutano and Perengano is very temporal to me, and I see the potential for it to continue. I chose four for this drawing because I wanted to avoid the possibility of seeing a central figure. Instead I wanted to convey the idea that they were an infinite series that could continue until I died. The clothes I wore were not significant although I was wearing clothing that I could be seen in often. I chose to frame the figures from the hips up because it is where I would be forced to pan, changing my horizon line. It was already difficult to draw my arms because my line of sight would change when I looked down even slightly, so I thought it would be best if I did not pretend I could accurately draw anything below my hips unless I changed my method.

The drawings have been described as closed, but I would add sterile to the description, as well. To return to the mural, *Presencia de América Latina*, I wanted to convey the message that I

was not offering myself or my body, as the allegory for Latin America does in the mural. The bodies of the figures in the drawing are not an open invitation, and I am not available. I cannot neglect the history of the female figure as allegory or the stereotype of Latinas as sexually available, so I thought it was important to sterilize and, dare I say, masculinize myself, especially when it came to the title, because I did not want to leave myself open to unwarranted sexualization. *Fulano, Mengano, Zutano and Perengano* are each names that indicate an unknown person, but they are also masculine names. I am saying nothing about my identity as Melina Mardueño, but I am making a cultural reference which only a few people might understand. I have always felt at odds with the feminine and masculine in Spanish, but given that the masculine plural becomes the gender neutral plural, I do not mind leaving the names in the masculine form. In terms of my body language, my arms are down and close to my body, and my face is at rest because I only want the viewer to know that I am looking back.



Figure 5 Detail of *Fulano, Mengano, Zutano, and Perengano*, and photographs of my mother and her father.

Identification:

I heavily relate to people based on the characteristics of the face. I do this most when I look at my family members. What better place to search for my identity than in my flesh and blood. I might dream of far-off, distant ancestors, but I think of the people who are only one or two generations away from me, too.

Despite the fact that families will rarely all look alike, there are characteristics we can trace. I must note I relate to my mother's family more than my father's because she managed to bring hundreds of photographs from home. I know the preservation of her history interests her because she keeps them in albums which she brings out every now and then. In it, she had photographs from events, festivals, trips, and old I.D.s. Although I did not think of it before, my work functions as identification photograph. Some of the ones in black and white especially relate to my drawings. I think of how often, or rarely, we get photographed for identification documents. My driver's license was taken four years ago, and I can say I do not look that way anymore. Perhaps it helps explain the disconnect I feel with myself and my identity. If I am not dark-skinned now, I was at some point, and it is difficult to deny or reject the version of myself that is used to identify me today.

Although I drew myself on the plain white background for years now, I justified my usage of it when I looked at daguerreotypes and old photographs that were so brightly contrasted that only the figure appears. Why do we separate the figure from its surroundings? Whitfield Lovell's *Kin* series also resonated deeply with me. Using photographs as his source material, his "stark" drawings of African-American subjects are made with Conte crayon on paper and are often paired with objects. While his works border on the photorealistic since there is rarely a trace of editing, it is apparent that mine are drawings. Perhaps because I draw myself, and not others, I do not worry about truthfulness to my physical self. After all, the source of my drawings is the image produced by looking into my mirror.

Since photographs and identification are important to the conversation surrounding my self-portraits, I think it is necessary to tie my work in with stereotypical photographs of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans: the mugshot. Back home in California, where I am from, we often reflect on the fact that when we see old friends from Kindergarten in the news, we are more than likely looking at their mugshot. In the same interview cited earlier, Harry Gamboa Jr. discussed a new photo project of his in which he planned to photograph the men who inspired him. "And Chicano men, when they're shown in media, it was often askance or in a mugshot. I wanted to do it so that the men were looking down at you. It was to generate some anxiety in the viewer because this would likely be the first time a Chicano would look down on them."⁷ It is not only Chicano men's mugshots but those of Mexican men as well who inform the image of the mestizo in the American imagination. How could we forget Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán? When he escaped and was captured in 2016, his mugshot was the image that circulated. He was the person that Americans imagined crossing the border. He was who the Chicanos joked would make Trump's wall obsolete with his tunnels. Although my drawings could be cropped and read

⁷ Miranda.

as mugshots, they lack the iconic placard that indicates that the subject is captured and is now identified as a prisoner.

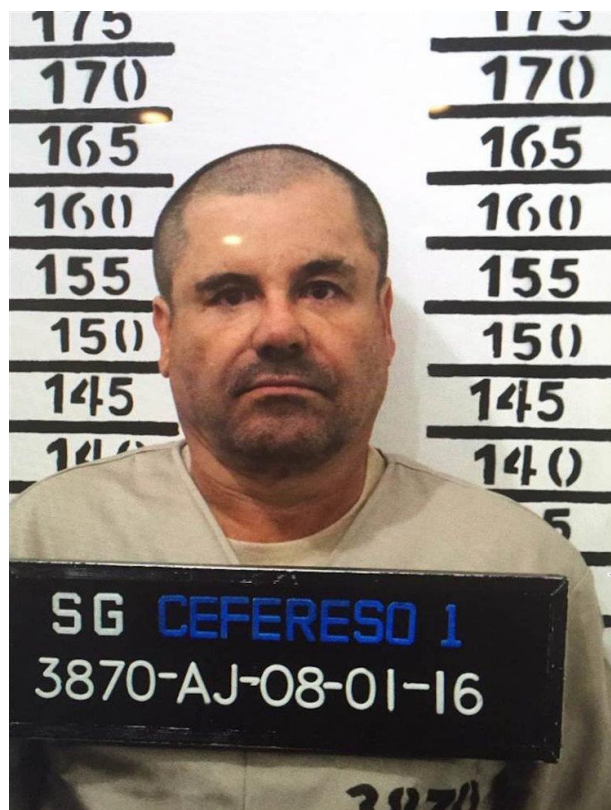


Figure 6 Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán's mugshot after being captured in 2016.

There I am:

In this video, I thought a lot about the ways in which I present myself. While I trim my short hair with clippers, I draw myself in my thesis studio like I normally would. I juxtaposed images of cutting and editing with the addition of lines on the paper on which I was drawing. Slowly, I begin to appear from the structural lines. My hair ends up on the floor, so I pick it up with a vacuum to remove all traces of my crude haircut. My video documentation becomes the only evidence. I'm always worried I'm doing something wrong. My friend was there with me to make sure I didn't leave any long spots on the back of my head. We did alright. I used a mirror to do the rest. It was off-screen like the mirror I used for drawing. Do we realize it is there unless we bring it up? I feel weirdly connected to my mom when the act of cleaning is brought up. I remember that not everyone cleans up after themselves. They get housekeepers, like my mom, to clean their houses.



Figure 7 Still from *There I am*, video.



Figure 8 Still from *There I am*, video.



Figure 9 Still from *There I am*, video.



Figure 10 Still from *There I am*, video.



Figure 11 Still from *There I am*, video.

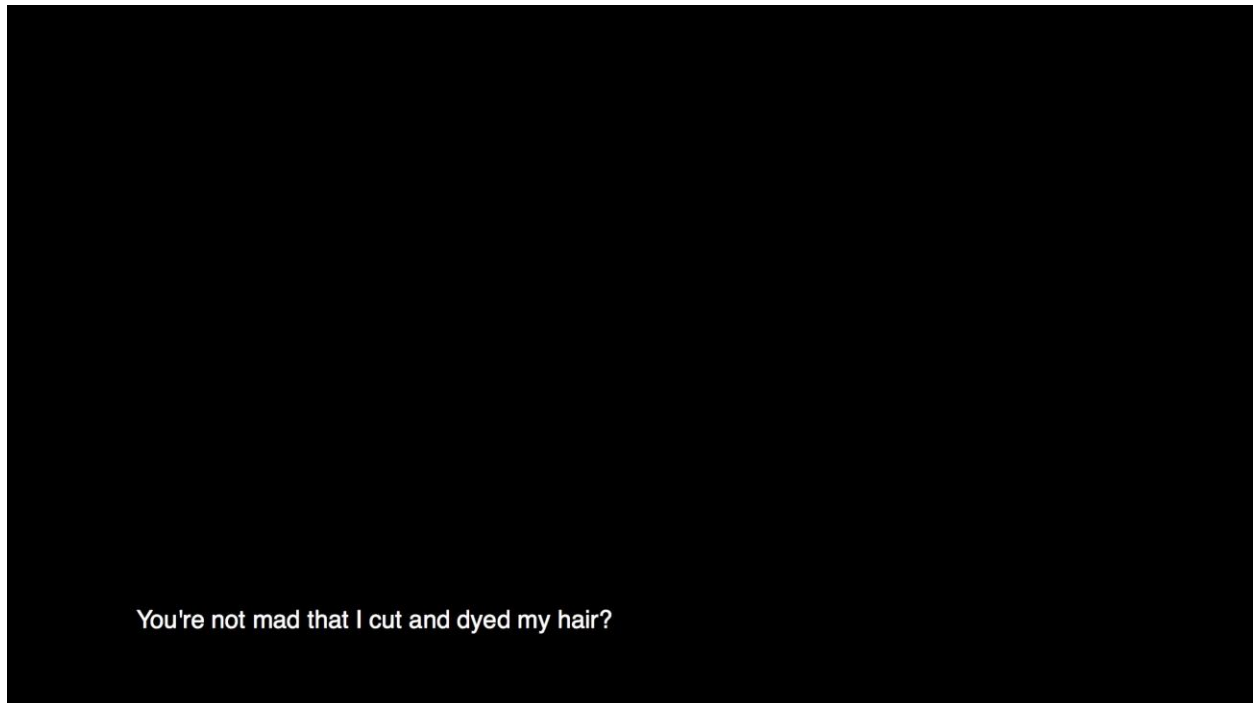


Figure 12 Still from *That I Painted my Hair*, video.

That I Painted My Hair:

A while had passed since I first told my mother that I cut and dyed my hair. I do not remember how she found out. I think I shared a picture of myself on social media, but I made sure I looked extra nice so she could not say I looked ugly. I sent her a text message asking her if she was mad. While she reassured me she was not, and that she loved me and that she loved me and my siblings unconditionally no matter what, I still felt like I was being scolded. As her voice was not present, I was convinced it was all in my head. When I recorded the audio of myself reading her messages, I knew it would not make sense for me to have my mother say her lines because they were given to me to interpret instead. When I read them (over and over), I wished I had her voice since I could remember it and I had it in my head.

In the video, I dyed my hair in the studio, and I embroidered because it was something my mother had taught me when I was young. I chose a red that specifically matched my hair.

That footage is also interrupted by the messages I that I recorded of myself reading them aloud. Translations into English on a black background appear as my voice sounds over silence. I hoped to indicate the distance between my mother and I, as well as the fact that this was only how I imagined the conversation would have transpired if I happened to be at home. I would have been forced to trudge to her room to show and tell her about my hair. She would likely have been sitting in her chair by her industrial sewing machines.

I often think of her in that spot since when I was younger, she would usually be in that chair making things while watching her novelas after work. I remember at one point she spent a lot of time making a lace tablecloth, so she would always be sitting there. Her hands moved pink thread in and out and around until small flowers appeared. I could not believe a tablecloth appeared on her lap one day. When my sisters and I were young, she would have us embroider small aprons with strawberries and flowers. A few years ago, I wanted to embroider a skirt and I started with a few flowers. Unfortunately, the skirt's material was already worn and it ripped. We cut out my design and sewed it onto the back of the jacket that I'm wearing in the video.

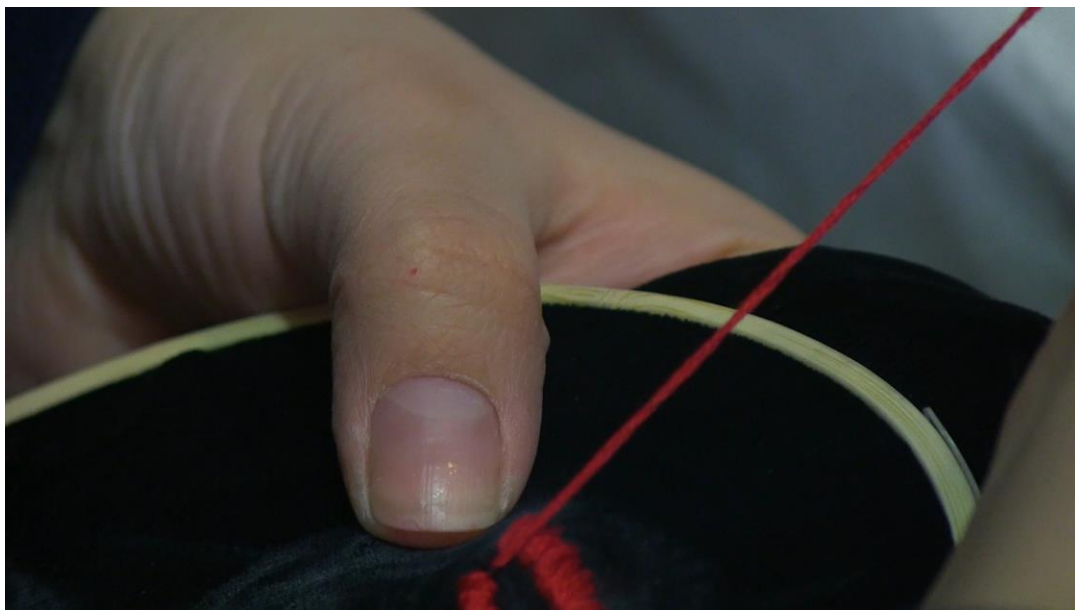


Figure 13 Still from *That I Painted my Hair*, video.

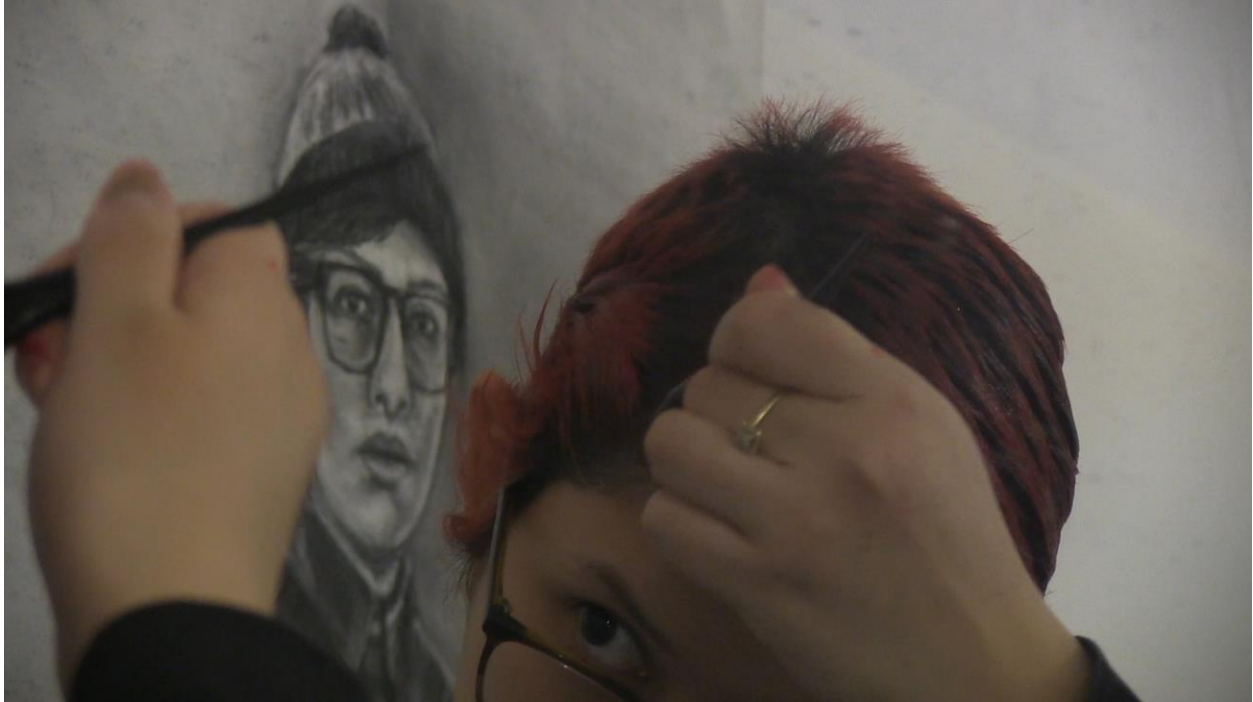


Figure 14 Still from *That I Painted my Hair*, video.

Hair and Gender:

The video, *That I Painted my Hair*, was a response to *There I am*. Whereas *There I am* was an interaction I had with myself, *That I Painted my Hair* only came about because of an exchange I had with my mother over text message. Unfortunately, by the time I began making the video, the messages had been automatically deleted by my mobile phone. Instead of asking my mother directly for screenshots of the conversation, I asked my younger brother to go into my mom's phone without her knowledge so he could send me the screenshots. I do not know why there was a need for secrecy. Mainly, I did not want her to know that I would be making our private conversation public. She is very self-conscious (likely why I am, too) and would have certainly opposed. I did not want her opinion to sway me or affect my idea.

I think hair is very important to my family and many other Mexican-descended people. My father is very old-fashioned since he grew up on a ranch in rural Jalisco, Mexico and left

school after sixth grade to begin working. My mother, on the other hand, grew up in a developing city in Michoacán, Mexico, finished high school, and got vocational training. When I was around twelve years old, I remember I got my first considerably short haircut. It was only a few inches long, but my hair still was not as short as a pixie. My dad thought it was too rebellious, and would say that I looked like a *roquera* which, given my tastes at the time, I did not mind being called although it was never a pleasure to be scolded by my father. My mother had for a long time agreed with him that it was inappropriate for me to have hair that was too short. I think she has since changed her mind as she has gotten older and now jokes that she needs to get herself a *corte de viejita*, or old lady haircut which are usually close cropped for the purpose of being low-maintenance. Nonetheless, I knew she would not be happy with this haircut, as most of it would be buzzed off in the back. I kept the front long avoid looking fully androgynous which would have surely gotten me into trouble for stepping into the realm of men's grooming practices. It is no secret that hair is tied to sexuality for us. Long hair has always been a sign of attractiveness for Latinxs.⁸ The last thing they want is for me to have the same haircut as my brother out of fear that perhaps I don't want to attract men. Although I do not fashion myself based on my sexuality, I cannot deny that whenever I am seen, there are assumptions made.

⁸ Rose Weitz, "Women and Their Hair: Seeking Power through Resistance and Accommodation," *Gender and Society* 15, no. 5 (2001): 672.

Clothing and Self-Fashioning:

I forget how I thought of *Do You See Me?*, the sweater piece. I wanted to make something “tangible,” as one of my classmates said, since I felt like my videos and drawings did not feel concrete enough for me. I still felt like I was not physically present. When I cut my hair for the first time in September, I kept the remnants of my hair because it was the first time in a long time that I had long “virgin,” or unprocessed, hair. I bleached it heavily my first year, and I had platinum hair for all of my second semester. It took two years for all of that hair to grow out again, so by September of 2017, I was feeling impulsive and I wanted a cathartic change in my appearance. Since it would also be my last year in college, I wanted to do something bold since I likely would not be able to have a shaved head after college unless I wanted to be on the streets. I guess this is what my parents warned me about when they cautioned me about becoming a *callejera*, or a wanderer. This would be the last time I would be away from my parents, and it was early enough in the semester to get away with it since I would not be seeing them for months. I felt like that would be the last time I could shape myself without any prior input from my parents or any feedback from them or relatives after the fact. As soon as I took my senior portraits, I was ready to let loose since my parents’ most important memories of my senior year in college would be determined by those photographs.

I recruited some friends, and we gathered in one of their rooms. We anticipated that I might want to use the hair, so we tied it in small ponytails and buzzed them off. We started in the center of my head, so there could be no second thoughts. The only solution would be to keep going, so off the rest went. I did not feel like I lost much, since I received small bundles of my hair afterwards. A week later, I decided I also needed to have a bold color, but I wanted one that I had not seen on anyone else in a while. I went with red because I was sick of seeing pastels. I

wanted love, pain, and fury on me even when I was feeling nothing. People with red hair want to be seen.⁹ There are stereotypes about redheads, but what about when I am clearly not a natural redhead? Again, I had a friend help me bleach my hair by insuring that we managed to cover all the small hairs on the back of my head. The process was successful, and I was left with a golden head. Luckily, the red was heavily pigmented, and it left no trace of the gold. There I was with bright red hair when I only had my natural brown hair just a few days before.

When I cut my hair again later because it had gotten too long, I did not think to keep it at first. Only after one of my advisors advised me to keep it did I collect the pile of hair from the trash. Luckily, it was sitting on top of some paper. I let it sit on my desk for months before finally realizing I could use it on fabric and more weeks after that until I decided on flocking. I was thinking about the college sweater that I purchased for myself. I felt it was a marker of my identity as a Wellesley College student, and I thought I could do something similar for my project. I thought about how clothes are an essential part of self-fashioning and about the clothes I was already wearing in my drawings. These sweaters are like a self-portrait of me, so I wanted them to mirror my drawing, too. I had the idea of using the white sweater that i wore in my drawing. It was already marked by the embroidered “c” on the chest, but i still saw the sweater as a blank space that could be worked on. I decided to mirror the drawing by making four sweaters, and I decided on the words, “Do you see me?” I liked the idea that I could cover myself with a sweater and that it would be the only thing that people saw.

To reinforce the self-portraiture, my mother and I made the sweaters to my measurements. The material was limited since I am long and large, so we had to try our best to make the most of what we had. We worked on each one-by-one since we based each new one on the last. When we got to the fourth and final sweater, we felt we had perfected the sweater-

⁹ Weitz, 674.

making method. My mother asked me, “Would you like me to go back and adjust the other three?” I replied, no, because I thought about editing my drawings to make them match the last one I made, but I did not want to lose that order or sense of time. Like the drawings, the sweaters correspond with time and are full of subtle differences. Needless to say, we keep them as they were.



Figure 15 Still from footage of me and my mother making the sweaters.

Closing Thoughts:

Despite feeling like I exist on the border of the cusp that is being Mexican-American, I know that I am still part of the vacuum that Harry Gamboa Jr. described. I know there are many others like me that feel alienated from all the labels that we have been bombarded with in an effort to try to describe our experience. I am still a Chicana by definition, and perhaps other Chicanas like me are feeling invisible in the mainstream because we have not created enough work to be recognized as more than outliers. I hoped by working on this project that I would feel more connected to myself. I wanted to be seen without reducing myself to a symbolic representation.

In the end, I wanted the viewer to see how I change and fluctuate; how I consist of so many experiences and emotions and actions; how I am myself and everything before me; how I am everything I wear and how I speak and the stories I tell. I am the places I have been, but also those where I have not. I am everything that was brought and everyone that moved. I recognize that, as a result of the constant shifting of who I am, perhaps my self-portrait will never be complete. I cannot neglect any part of myself, and I must confront it all.

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